

Sketch

Volume 1, Number 1

1934

Article 16

Memento

Alice Wortman*

*Iowa State University

Copyright ©1934 by the authors. *Sketch* is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
<http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch>

MEMENTO

By Alice Wortman

THE LITTLE BLACK book was yielding up its charming ghosts as Larry read with mingled feelings:

Bernadine Brown
721 N. Gray Road
Tel. 7922

The front porch of the big house had been cool and inviting as he had come up the gravel walk, he remembered. Bernadine lay in the hammock reading a magazine; she didn't move and he sprawled in a deck chair near her, both of them too lazy to keep up a conversation. Her curly brown hair was rumpled and the heat gave her pert little nose a becoming shine. She looked a kiss at him, and he looked one back at her. Silly custom they had when people were around.

They had been good friends, and then—well, better friends. That Christmas Eve affair at the Country Club when she had danced four straight with Jack Pierce—though he wouldn't let her see it made him jealous—was pretty bad. Funny how you remember things like that. Sweet kid, she was—senior at Northwestern and engaged to a DKE.

LARRY TURNED a few pages, when this name held his attention for a moment:

Betty Fay
409 Dumas Ap'ts.

Oh boy! Whatta blonde! And could she dance! Not only could! From Birmingham, Alabama. These southern gals! He had met her at a fraternity dance, borrowed his roommate's car, and taken her home at ten o'clock via Newberg, Mapleville, La Crosse, and Horton Heights. They got pretty well acquainted that night. O. K. till she had started dating about three houses.

The next name caught his eye.

*Joan Edwards
471 Bowen Ave.
Phoenix, Arizona*

She had been in his abnormal psychology seminar at summer school—the only girl with three middle-aged men and Larry. From the first her scintillant wit had appealed to him, as well as the boyish grace of her beautiful body. She rode like a cowboy—carelessly and surely. Her tennis game was fine and steady, and she played an exceptional hand of bridge. She was the one girl with whom he had ever danced who could be termed technically “a divine dancer.” Once he had kissed her—once only. It wasn’t much of a kiss for either of them, but it proved one thing—that they weren’t meant to kiss each other, only to play tennis and swim and ride and be the best friends ever.

Larry reflected that he must be getting old—platonic affairs were beginning to appeal to him. Well, the little book didn’t look very pernicious, but he closed it and put it back in the drawer, wondering if love had passed him by or what.

* * *

MARY LOUISE smiled to herself as she recalled the conversation she had had with Larry about diaries. Thinking it over, she decided Larry’s way was more systematic, at least, than hers, but she couldn’t be sure which was the more absurd. Mary L. didn’t remember every boy she had met, perhaps, but she had very good accounts of her reactions to the more important ones and certainly not in a very incriminating form. This lack of spiciness was compensated for by the fact that if anyone ever could have understood the little record even partially she would have felt perfectly silly.

She giggled inwardly and opened the portfolio. The first page she selected bore the relique of her first love, written in pencil in writing she scarcely recognized.

TO A BOY WITH DELICIOUS HAIR

*I can write metered sonnets for boys with perfect hair, eyes, and
noses,*

But for you I must use this kind of verse.

It expresses my feelings.

*My thoughts about you are not deep like the breaking of waves
on a rocky beach—not steady.*

*They are sharp and quick-felt like a scream, or a fast indrawn
breath, or cold water.*

*Your hair is unsmooth but enchanting as the pointed ears of a
faun.*

*You have the chin of a peasant leader and the forehead of a
maiden knight.*

*The vision of you will arise in my mind when I see you no longer.
I shall draw a quick breath in remembering you and your beauty
As if you were a sunset or a constellation.*

Mary L. snickered a bit at the description of Wally Jones, high school football captain. He was certainly far from a sunset and all that, but he was nice to remember. He was a medical student at the University and an honor man. You wouldn't have thought old Wally had it in him.

She glanced at another paper—this one written in green ink and copied from *College Humor*.

DUSTY MOON

*The dust of the moon
Fell down on me
Last night, and the sand
And the sycamore tree.*

*And the dust of the moon
Got in our eyes.
We were not calm.
We were not wise.*

*Now we walk sedate
In day's pale light . . .
But there'll be a dusty moon
Tonight.*

And penciled down below the tearful-looking words:

"O no, there won't. Jack's going home tomorrow."

She remembered poignantly the sting of that little foot note. Jack had lived next door to their cottage at the lake one summer

long, and then school had come around again. Jack's family had gone home two weeks before hers. Awful two weeks!

THE NEXT POEM lacked a title, among other things.

*Loving you,
I was the smoke
Caught in the thorn bushes
At the side of the railroad track
Disintegrating
After the train
Had rumbled
Away.*

That would be the roommate's brother, wouldn't it? He had been very nice to her, very attentive, very brotherly—no more—and she had lived through it all, somehow. She hardly remembered the man.

Mary L. sighed and closed the portfolio. What a lot of tripe that was, really! Every bit of it! Wouldn't she ever meet a man who didn't turn out to be just material for bum verses?

* * *

The moon ducked under a cloud, leaving the blue roadster in total darkness where it was parked under an elm on the top of a hill.

"Larry—" she began a little hesitantly.

"Yes, darling."

Mary L. placed a finger on his lapel meditatively. "What are you going to do with your little book? You know—the one with the girls in?" She was thinking how the fire had blackened the sheets in her portfolio this morning and how the flames had laughed at all those silly poems.

He put his hand into his pocket and took out a pencil and a tiny leaf torn from the little black book. "This is all there is left," he said and showed her:

*Mary Louise Ferguson
3201 Beech Ave.
Tel. 660*

With the pencil, then, he carefully drew a line through her name and wrote instead:

Mrs. Lawrence Campbell